Australian Bureau of Statistics

1264.0 - Language Variables, 1997
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Summary

About this Release

ABOUT THIS RELEASE

ABS Language Variables provide a means of standardising the way the ABS and other agencies collect and disseminate information relating to language usage in Australia. Variables identify population groups likely to experience disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English, and provide data on the stock of languages spoken in Australian homes. Data on languages spoken in the home are regarded as an indicator of active ethnicity and are useful for the study of inter-generational language retention.

Note: 20 March 2014

The Standards for Language Variables were updated. To view the updated Standards for Language Variables click here**.**

Contents

First Language Spoken	(This standard has been superseded. To access the updated standard refer to 1200.0.55.005 - Language Standards)
Languages Spoken at Home	(This standard has been superseded. To access the updated standard refer to 1200.0.55.005 - Language Standards)
Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home	(This standard has been superseded. To access the updated standard refer to 1200.0.55.005 - Language Standards)
Main Language Spoken at Home	(This standard has been superseded. To access the updated standard refer to 1200.0.55.005 - Language Standards)
Proficiency in Spoken English	(This standard has been superseded. To access the updated standard refer to 1200.0.55.005 - Language Standards)

Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home

Contents >> Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home

This section contains the following subsection :

Introduction

Contents >> Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home >> Introduction

1. The development of Australia as a multicultural society and the subsequent wider interest in constructing statistical profiles of particular ethnic or cultural population groups has, over the years, increased the need for quality language data.

2. To meet this growing need, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has incorporated language questions in a range of social statistical collections and has developed standards for a number of language variables for use both within and outside the organisation.

3. **Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home** identifies languages, other than English, which are spoken within the home. Data on languages spoken in the home are regarded as an indicator of 'active' ethnicity and language use, and are useful for the study of inter-generational language retention. The availability of such data may help providers of language, welfare and community services to effectively target the geographic areas or population groups that need those services.

4. The variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home has been endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as one of the four Minimum Core Indicators of the standard set of indicators for use in measuring cultural and linguistic diversity. The set is to be progressively implemented in administrative and service settings to provide data to determine, measure and monitor service needs (access and equity requirements), and to provide a measure of cultural diversity in its broader sense.

Underlying concepts

Contents >> Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home >> Underlying concepts

Name of variable

5. The standard name of the variable is Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home. The standard acronym for this variable is MLOTESH. The name of the variable should not be shortened to Main Language Spoken at Home as this would be inaccurate and may confuse users.

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

6. Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is the main language, other than English, spoken by a person in his/her home, on a regular basis, to communicate with other residents of the home and regular visitors to the home.

7. Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'. That is, it is an attribute of an individual as opposed to a family or household.

Operational definition

8. Operationally, Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is defined as the main language, other than English, reported by a person as being spoken in his/her home. If a person reports that he/she speaks more than one language at home (not including English), they are asked to report the language spoken most often.

9. The issue of what constitutes a language is addressed in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS Ccat. no. 1267.0) which can be found here. Further references to ASCL in this standard are to the Second Edition unless otherwise stated.

Discussion of conceptual issues

10. Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home identifies languages other than English that people speak within the home environment and in family interactions. If more than one language is spoken in the home, respondents are asked to report the language spoken most often. This variable maximises numbers for the more established migrant communities where the main language spoken outside the home is English but a language other than English is spoken at home. In some cases, however, this measure may not reflect complete language use, for example, when English is the only language spoken in the home but a language other than English is spoken outside the home, within a person's ethnic community. This measure may also record those people whose main and preferred language is English but who have learnt another language which is occasionally, but not normally, spoken at home.

11. Related language variables such as First Language Spoken, Preferred Language, Language Usually Spoken, Languages Spoken at Home and Main Language Spoken at Home have been used in collections to measure aspects of Australian language usage. It is considered that the variables Main Language Spoken at Home and Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home may be used in preference to other language variables when the aim is to measure 'active ethnicity' or the likely disadvantage experienced by persons whose usual language is not English.

12. Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is one of four language variables (the others are **Languages Spoken at Home, First Language Spoken** and **Main Language Spoken at Home**), one of which must be asked before a question on **Proficiency in Spoken English**. Proficiency in Spoken English identifies people who may potentially suffer a disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English. The purpose of asking a language question before the proficiency question is to filter out those people who mainly speak English, as the purpose of the question is not to attempt to assess the spoken English capacity of the Australian population in general. Respondents are sequenced to the Proficiency in Spoken English question only if a language other than English is selected in the language question.

13. The treatment of sign languages such as Auslan need to be considered when identifying languages spoken in the home. Individuals who use non-verbal forms of communication make up at least one per cent of the Australian population (see the 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers). It should be noted that sign languages fall into two groups, signed English/finger spelling and other sign languages such as Auslan. Signed English/ finger spelling is considered to be another form of 'English' and is treated as such. Auslan is regarded as a distinct language and is treated as a language other than English.

Classification and coding

Contents >> Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home >> Classification and coding

The classification criteria

14. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) is used when collecting, aggregating and disseminating data on language usage in Australia. Two classification criteria are used in the ASCL to form the categories of the classification:

- the relationships between languages owing to their evolution from a common ancestral language (genetic affinity); and
- geographic proximity of languages in terms of the areas in which they originated. (This refers to the area where a language first became, or was first recognised as, a distinct entity.)

15. Further details regarding the classification criteria used in the language classification can be found in the ASCL.

The standard classification

16. When collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home, the ASCL is used. The term 'language' is used in the ASCL to describe languages, dialects, pidgins, creoles and invented and sign languages.

17. With the exception of the Yolngu Matha languages (Narrow Group 82) this classification has a three-level hierarchical structure. For the Yolngu Matha languages, an extra level has been added between the narrow group and the language level of the classification in the second edition. These extra level categories are meaningful and useful groups of base level units which taken together form the narrow group. Nine 'extra level' categories have been included for the narrow group. The extra level is identified by a three-digit code, the first two digits of which identify the narrow group. The most detailed level of the classification consists of 364 (170 Australian Indigenous and 194 non-Australian Indigenous) base level units which are languages. Included in the 364 base level units are 41 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) and three 'other' categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

18. The second level of the classification comprises 51 narrow groups of languages which

are similar in terms of the classification criteria (genetic affinity and geographic proximity in terms of the areas in which they originated). Included in the 51 narrow groups are seven 'other' categories which consist of languages which do not fit into a particular narrow group.

19. The first and most general level of the classification comprises nine broad groups of languages including one 'other' category. Broad groups are formed by aggregating geographically proximate narrow groups.

20. Further details regarding the standard classification and code structure can be found in the ASCL.

The code structure

21. One, two, and four-digit codes are assigned to the first, second and base level units of the classification respectively. The first digit identifies the broad group in which each language or narrow group is contained. The first two digits taken together identify the narrow group in which each language is contained. The four-digit codes represent each of the 364 Languages or base level units.In the exceptional Narrow Group 82 of the ASCL, Second Edition the first three digits identify the third level classification groupings of languages while the four digit code identifies each specific language (see 22 b).

22. The following examples illustrate the coding scheme:

a.   Broad Group   5   Southern Asian Languages
      Narrow Group   52   Indo-Aryan
      Language   5206   Nepali

b.   Broad Group   8   Australian Indigenous
                                Languages
      Narrow Group   82   Yolngu Matha
      Extra Level   824   Dhuwala
      Language   8245   Madarrpa

23. Further details regarding the code structure can be found in the ASCL.

Residual categories and codes

24. In narrow groups, a four-digit code, consisting of the two digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits '99', is reserved as a residual 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. Additionally, in the third level classification groups of Narrow Group 82, the three-digit group code is followed by '9' to denote a 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. All languages which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the residual 'n.e.c.' or 'other' category of the narrow group to which they relate.

25. In each broad group, two-digit codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by '9'. These categories are termed 'other' and consist of separately identified languages which do not fit into any of the narrow groups contained within the broad group, on the basis of the classification criteria.

26. Further details regarding the residual categories 'n.e.c.' and codes used when coding

language data can be found in the ASCL.

Supplementary codes

27. The supplementary codes are of two types:

- four-digit codes ending with one, two or three zeros; and
- four-digit codes commencing with three zeros.

28. Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (n.f.d.) codes and are used to code responses to a question about language which cannot be coded to the detailed (language) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

29. Four-digit codes commencing with '000' are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described languages, etc., which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated a language, narrow group or broad group code.

30. Further details regarding the supplementary codes (eg. 'not further defined' (n.f.d.), 'inadequately described' and 'not stated') used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Scope of the variable

31. The variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home applies to all persons.

Application of the classification to other variables

32. The ASCL can be used for a variety of variables. These include: First Language Spoken, Main Language Spoken at Home, Language(s) Spoken at Home, Language of Greatest Competency and Preferred Language.

Coding procedures

33. Language responses to the Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home question are coded to the ASCL using the guidelines detailed in that classification. Each language response is matched with an entry in the ASCL Coding Index to determine the correct code.

Coding indexes

34. A coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the ASCL and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home. It contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to language and their correct classification codes. Use of the coding index enables responses to be coded accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

35. Copies of the coding index sorted in alphabetical and numerical (code) order can be found in the ASCL, Second Edition publication. They can also be found separately in

electronic form (.csv and .xls) on the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Coding Indexes

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736, fax (02) 6252 5281 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

Collection methods

Standard question module

36. There are two standard question modules for Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home:

- The Question Module for Detailed Data elicits the most detailed responses and data on Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home.

  There are two alternatives for the Question Module for Detailed Data which may be used, depending on space and cost considerations:

  - Alternative one: a set of 'most likely' languages with tick boxes and a 'Yes, Other -please specify' response category for writing a language not specified in the tick box list;
  - Alternative two: a tick box for 'No, English Only' and a 'Yes. Other - please specify' write-in category.

  Alternative two is more compact but will incur additional coding costs.

- The Question Module for Minimum Data contains only the tick box options 'No, English only' and 'Yes, Other' and therefore does not collect details as to which language other than English is spoken.

Question module for detailed data

Alternative one

37. This standard question for detailed data for the variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is recommended for all household-based surveys and other statistical and administrative collections designed to collect extensive data on main language other than English spoken at home. It provides detailed information about the language background of the Australian population, in addition to identifying those respondents who may suffer disadvantage associated with a lack of English competence.

38. The standard question module for obtaining detailed data for the variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home is as follows:

Q1. **[Do you] [Does the person] [Does (name)] speak a language other than English at home?**
(If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often.)

No, English only ❑

Yes, Italian ❑

Yes, Greek ❑

Yes, Cantonese ❑

Yes, Arabic ❑

Yes, Mandarin ❑

Yes, Vietnamese ❑

Yes, Spanish ❑

Yes, German ❑

Yes, Hindi ❑

Yes, Other - please specify: . . . .

38a. A computer assisted interviewing (CAI) module for standard language variables has been developed. This module includes four standard language questions including the standard question module for obtaining detailed data for Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home and can be found in the Blaise instrument: - see **Appendix A** for information on how to install and run this module. If you require assistance please contact the Assistant Director of Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support on extension 6680.

38b. To use the CAI module for obtaining detailed data for the variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home please inform Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support at the question specification stage of survey development by including a statement to that effect in your question specifications.

39. Instructions are included for those respondents who speak more than one language, other than English, in the home. For self-enumerated surveys, respondents are instructed to indicate the language other than English spoken most often and to mark one box in the checklist or to write in one response where tick boxes don't apply. For interview-based surveys, an interviewer could use a prompt like "Which of those languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] use most often?" if a multiple response is given after asking the question.

40. The list of languages provided with this question module has been included primarily on the basis of the statistical significance of these languages in the Australian context. Approximately 90% of Australians speak at least one of these languages and the use of this list ensures compatibility across collections and minimises coding costs. Cantonese and

Mandarin are both included to ensure that the response 'Chinese', for example, is not erroneously coded to one or the other. It will be reviewed periodically as different languages assume a greater or lesser significance in the Australian context as a result of changing migration patterns.

41. The 'Yes, Other' category is included for those people who speak a language in the home that is not offered in the list as a response to the question. 'Please specify' is added to the 'Other' category and a space is provided for respondents to write in their language.

42. Each language response to the question will need to be matched to an entry in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition, Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

Alternative two

43. If there is a need for detailed information but space constraints are an over-riding consideration then the tick boxes can be deleted (except the tick box for 'No, English only'), leaving the 'Yes, Other - please specify' option for respondents to write in their language. If this is done, however, there will be significant additional coding costs since each response will need to be matched to an entry in the ASCL coding index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

44. This is only likely to be appropriate in small scale data collection activities and in cases where data entry of verbatim responses is an administrative requirement or where optical character recognition data capture technologies are used, allowing automatic matching of response data with index entries. The question module would be as follows:

Q1. **[Do you] [Does the person] [Does (name)] speak a language other than English at home?**

No, English only ❑

Yes, Other - please specify language: . . . .

Question module for minimum data

45. The standard question module for minimum data for the variable Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home is as follows:

Q1. **[Do you] [Does the person] [Does (name)] speak a language other than English at home?**

No, English only ❑

Yes, Other ❑

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46. This question is suitable for administrative collections or for surveys where there is no requirement for detailed language data or which have space constraints. It is primarily

recommended as an identifier of those respondents who may require assistance to access services and information because they may possess inadequate English language skills. Owing to its lack of detail, this module is a far less precise measuring device for the identification of language usage.

Standard input categories

Input categories for detailed data

47. The standard input categories for Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home are the base level units of the ASCL and are represented by their four-digit codes. For operational reasons, residual categories and codes and supplementary codes also exist to enable 'not elsewhere classified' and 'inadequately described' responses to be processed within a collection coded at the four-digit level. Full details regarding the standard classification and code structure, residual categories and codes, and supplementary codes can be found in the ASCL.

Input categories for minimum data

48. The standard input categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are:

- English only
- Other language.

Measurement issues and related classifications

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Measurement issues

55. No specific measurement issues apply to the variable Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home beyond the normal constraints affecting statistical collections, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors which may not permit the collection or output of data for some of the categories at the lower levels of the classification.

Related classifications

56. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), First Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) was used to code language data in the 1996 and 2001 Censuses. The ASCL, Second Edition will be used to code language data in the 2006 Census. Correspondence tables have been prepared to compare the two versions of the ASCL, and also the ASCL (First Edition) with the 1991 Census. These correspondence tables can be obtained from the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Correspondence Tables

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-

mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

Output

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Standard output categories

Output categories for detailed data

49. The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their requirements. Data can be presented at broad group level, narrow group level, or the base (language) level. If necessary, significant languages within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining languages within the narrow group are aggregated. For example, the base level category 'Tiwi' can be separately identified as an output category within the 'Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' Narrow Group, with the remaining base-level categories in this narrow group aggregated in an 'Other Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' category. The same principle can be adopted to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

50. Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of statistics, data should be captured, classified and stored at the base-level of the ASCL wherever possible. Collecting and storing data at the most detailed level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of statistics, enables more detailed and complex analysis, facilitates comparisons with previous data using different classifications, and preserves information that provides maximum flexibility for future use of the data.

51. However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification.

52. The following is an example of standard output categories for the nine broad groups of the ASCL, Second Edition, which have either significant narrow groups (second-level categories) or languages base level categories) highlighted. This example allows separate identification of all languages with more than 35,000 speakers (aged five years and over) according to data on Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home in the 2001 Census:

      Speaks English only
      Main other Languages:
      Northern European Languages
            Dutch
            German
            Other Northern European Languages
      Southern European Languages
            French
            Greek

Italian
Maltese
Spanish
Other Southern European Languages
Eastern European Languages
South Slavic
Croatian
Macedonian
Serbian
Other South Slavic
West Slavic
Polish
Other West Slavic
Other Eastern European Languages
Southwest and Central Asian Languages
Arabic (including Lebanese)
Turkish
Other Southwest and Central Asian Languages
Southern Asian Languages
Hindi
Other Southern Asian Languages
Southeast Asian Languages
Filipino
Indonesian
Tagalog
Vietnamese
Other Southeast Asian Languages
Eastern Asian Languages
Chinese
Cantonese
Mandarin
Other Chinese
Korean
Other Eastern Asian Languages
Australian Indigenous Languages
Other Languages

Output categories for minimum data

53. The standard output categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are:

- English only
- Other language

Supporting variables

54. Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home does not require any supporting variables.

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), 1986. The Measurement of Ethnicity in the Australian Census of Population and Housing: Report to the Australian Statistician by the 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee, cat. no. 2172.0, ABS, Canberra.

- ABS, 1996. 1996 Census Dictionary, cat. no. 2901.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 1996. ABS Views on Census Classification, cat. no. 2012.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 1997. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), cat. no. 1267.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 1999. Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, cat. no. 1289.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 2005. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition, cat. no. 1267.0, ABS, Canberra.

First Language Spoken

This section contains the following subsection :
Introduction
Underlying concepts
Classification and coding
Collection methods
Output
Measurement issues and related classifications
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Introduction

1. There is a long-standing demand for objective information about the extent to which people living in Australia may be disadvantaged or suffer discrimination as a result of their linguistic or cultural background. As a result, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has received a growing number of enquiries from service providers, data collection agencies, government agencies, community groups, academics and private sector organisations relating to both language data and to methodologies for collecting and classifying language information.

2. To meet these growing needs, the ABS has incorporated language questions into a range of social statistical collections and has developed standards for a number of language

variables for use both within and outside the organisation.

3. It should be noted that although the language variable addressed in this standard is entitled **First Language Spoken**, it includes sign languages. The name of the variable is First Language Spoken as it is designed to measure the language a person first spoke rather than the language they could first read or write.

4. Persons whose first language is not English have been identified by programme providers as a population group that is likely to experience disadvantage when seeking to obtain equal access to government and community programmes and services in Australia. Data relating to First Language Spoken may thus provide a surrogate indicator of disadvantage potentially associated with a lack of English competence or with other factors associated with cultural background.

5. The variable First Language Spoken has been endorsed by the Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (SCIMA) as one of the standard set of indicators for use in measuring cultural and linguistic diversity. It is to be progressively implemented in administrative and service settings to provide data to determine, measure and monitor service needs (access and equity requirements), and to provide a measure of cultural diversity in its broader sense.

Underlying concepts

Contents >> First Language Spoken >> Underlying concepts

Name of variable

6. The standard name for the variable is First Language Spoken.

7. There are a number of different names and definitions associated with the concept of first language. Terms such as 'Native Language' and 'Mother Tongue' are widely used internationally, however 'First Language Spoken' is more appropriate within the Australian context. 'First Language' is the term used in Australian government policy documents and is widely referred to in linguistic journals. The term is unambiguous, concise and clearly describes the concept. It is preferred to alternative word ordering (eg 'Language First Spoken') primarily because its meaning is clearer, but has the additional advantage of being more easily abbreviated to 'First Language' or 'First Lang' in table headings etc.

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

8. First Language Spoken is defined as the first language an individual masters during the language acquisition phase of intellectual development. This would generally be the language spoken in the home by the people who have raised the individual from infancy.

9. First Language Spoken is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'.

Operational definition

10. Operationally, First Language Spoken is defined as the language the respondent identifies, or remembers, as being the first language which they could understand to the extent of being able to conduct a conversation.

11. The issue of what constitutes a language is addressed in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition, (ABS cat. no. 1267.0). Further references to ASCL in this standard are to the Second Edition unless otherwise stated.

Discussion of conceptual issues

12. Individuals who use non-verbal forms of communication make up at least one per cent of the Australian population. It should be noted that sign languages fall into two groups signed English/finger spelling and other sign languages such as Auslan. Signed English/finger spelling is considered to be another form of English and is treated as such. Auslan is regarded as a distinct language and individuals who report their first language as Auslan (or another recognised sign language) are considered to have a first language other than English.

13. The issue of how individuals who use non-verbal forms of communication might interpret the question, 'Which language did you first **speak** as a child?' was considered and the alternative question, 'Which language did you first **learn** as a child?' contemplated. However, it is considered there are likely to be problems involved with the interpretation of the word 'learn'. For example, it is possible that respondents may interpret the question 'Which language did you first learn as a child?' to mean a second language that they have formally learned at school. Furthermore, as ABS experience indicates use of the word 'speak' poses few response problems for people who use sign language, the question module proposed is, 'Which language did you first **speak** as a child?'

14. While there is some interest in the identification of respondents who claim to have spoken two languages as first languages for those studying changing language patterns, cultural affiliation or expected language proficiency, research suggests that dual first language speakers in Australia are likely to be rare and data produced from such a question may not be statistically viable. (For instance, preliminary data from the Adult Literacy Survey indicates that only about 1% of respondents claimed that they were dual first language speakers.) Therefore, the question modules used for this variable are not designed to measure dual first language speakers and should not be used for this purpose.

15. First Language Spoken is one of four language variables (the others are **Languages Spoken at Home, Main Language Spoken at Home** and **Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home**), one of which must be asked before a question on **Proficiency in Spoken English**. Proficiency in Spoken English identifies people who may potentially suffer a disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English. The purpose of asking a language question before the proficiency question is to filter out those people who mainly speak English, as the purpose of the question is not to attempt to assess the spoken English capacity of the Australian population in general. Respondents are sequenced to the Proficiency in Spoken English question only if a language other than English is selected in the language question.

Classification and coding

The classification criteria

16. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) is used when collecting, aggregating and disseminating data on language usage in Australia. Two classification criteria are used in the ASCL to form the categories of the classification:

- the relationships between languages owing to their evolution from a common ancestral language (genetic affinity); and
- geographic proximity of languages in terms of the areas in which they originated. (This refers to the area where a language first became, or was first recognised as, a distinct entity.)

17. Further details regarding the classification criteria used in the language classification can be found in the ASCL.

The standard classification

18. When collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the variable First Language Spoken, the ASCL is used. With the exception of the Yolngu Matha languages grouping, this classification has a three-level hierarchical structure. For Narrow Group 82 Yolngu Matha an extra level has been added between the narrow group and the language levels of the classification in the second edition. These 'extra level' categories are meaningful and useful groups of base level units. Taken together the 'extra level' categories form the narrow group. Nine 'extra level' categories have been included for the narrow group. The extra level is identified by a three-digit code, the first two digits of which identify the narrow group.

19. The most detailed level of the classification consists of 364 (170 Australian Indigenous and 194 non-Australian Indigenous) base level units which are languages. Included in the 364 base level units are 41 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) and three 'other' categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

20. The second level of the classification comprises 51 narrow groups of languages which are similar in terms of the classification criteria. Included in the 51 narrow groups are seven 'other' categories which consist of languages which do not fit into a particular narrow group.

21. The first and most general level of the classification comprises nine broad groups of languages including one 'other' category. Broad groups are formed by aggregating geographically proximate narrow groups.

22. Further details regarding the standard classification and code structure can be found in the ASCL.

The code structure

23. One, two and four-digit codes are assigned to the first, second and third-level units of the classification respectively. The first digit identifies the broad group in which each language or narrow group is contained. The first two digits taken together identify the Narrow Group in which each Language is contained. The four-digit codes represent each of

the 364 Languages or base level units. In the exceptional Narrow Group 82 of the ASCL, Second Edition, the first three digits identify the third level classification groupings of languages while the four digit code identifies each specific language (see 24 b).

24. The following examples illustrate the coding scheme:

a. Broad Group   5   Southern Asian Languages
    Narrow Group   52   Indo-Aryan
    Language   5206   Nepali

b. Broad Group   8   Australian Indigenous
                             Languages
    Narrow Group   82   Yolngu Matha
    Extra Level   824   Dhuwala
    Language   8245   Madarrpa

25. Further details regarding the code structure can be found in the ASCL.

Residual categories and codes

26. In narrow groups, a four-digit code, consisting of the two digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits '99', is reserved as a residual 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. Additionally, in the third level classification groups of Narrow Group 82, the three digit group code is followed by '9' to denote a 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. All languages which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the residual 'n.e.c.' or 'other' category of the narrow group to which they relate.

27. In each broad group, two-digit codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by '9'. These categories are termed 'other' and consist of separately identified languages which do not fit into any of the narrow groups contained within the broad group, on the basis of the classification criteria.

28. Further details regarding the residual categories 'n.e.c.' and codes used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Supplementary codes

29. The supplementary codes are of two types:

- four-digit codes ending with one, two or three zeros; and
- four-digit codes commencing with three zeros.

30. Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (n.f.d.) codes and are used to code responses to a question about language which cannot be coded to the detailed (language) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

31. Four-digit codes commencing with '000' are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described languages, etc., which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated a language, narrow group or broad group code.

32. Further details regarding the supplementary codes (eg. 'not further defined' (n.f.d.), 'inadequately described' and 'not stated') used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Scope of the variable

33. The variable First Language Spoken applies to all persons.

Application of the classification to other variables

34. The ASCL can be used for a variety of variables. These include: Main Language Spoken at Home, Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home, Language(s) Spoken at Home, Language of Greatest Competency, and Preferred Language.

Coding procedures

35. Language responses to the First Language Spoken question are coded to the ASCL using the guidelines detailed in that classification. Each language response is matched with an entry in the ASCL Coding Index to determine the correct code.

Coding indexes

36. A coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the ASCL and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to First Language Spoken. It contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to language and their correct classification codes. Use of the coding index enables responses to be coded accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

37. Copies of the coding index sorted in alphabetical and numerical (code) order can be found in the ASCL, Second Edition publication. They can also be found separately in electronic form (.csv and .xls) on the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Coding Indexes

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

Collection methods

COLLECTION METHODS

STANDARD QUESTION MODULES

38. There are two standard question modules for First Language Spoken:

- The Question Module for Detailed Data elicits the most detailed responses and data on First Language Spoken.

  There are two alternatives for the Question Module for Detailed Data which may be used, depending on space and cost considerations:

  - Alternative one: a set of 'most likely' languages with tick boxes and an 'Other -please specify' response category for writing a language not specified in the tick box list;
  - Alternative two: a tick box for 'English' and an 'Other - please specify' write-in category.

  Alternative two is more compact but will incur additional coding costs.

- The Question Module for Minimum Data contains only the tick box options 'English' and 'Other' and therefore does not collect details as to which language other than English is spoken.

Question module for detailed data

Alternative one

39. This standard question module for detailed data for First Language Spoken is recommended for all household-based and administrative collections designed to collect extensive data on first language spoken. It provides detailed information about the language background of the Australian population, in addition to identifying those respondents who may suffer disadvantage associated with a lack of English competence.

40. The standard question module for obtaining detailed data for First Language Spoken follows:

Q1. Which language [did you] [did the person] [did (name)] <u>first</u> speak as a child?

Mark one box only.

English	q
Italian	q
Greek	q
Cantonese	q
Arabic	q
Mandarin	q
Vietnamese	q
Spanish	q
German	q

Hindi	q
Other - please specify:	. . . .

40a. A computer assisted interviewing (CAI) module has been developed for the standard language variables. This module contains four standard language questions including the standard question module for obtaining detailed data for First Language Spoken and can be found in the Blaise instrument - see **Appendix A** for information on how to install and run this module. If you require assistance please contact the Assistant Director of Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support on extension 6680.

40b. To use the standard question module for obtaining detailed data for First Language Spoken please inform Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support at the question specification stage of survey development, by including a statement to that effect in your question specifications.

41. Interviewers should be instructed to mark 'English' for respondents who identify English and another language as their first language. If two (or more) languages are identified by the respondent, and none of them are English, interviewers should be instructed to prompt again for the predominant first language spoken. If more than one answer is still provided they should mark the first language mentioned as the respondent's first language. For self-enumerated questionnaires, respondents should be instructed to mark one box only.

42. The languages provided with this module have been included primarily on the basis of the statistical significance of these languages in the Australian context. Cantonese and Mandarin are both included to ensure that the response 'Chinese', for example, is not erroneously coded to one or the other. Approximately 90% of Australians speak at least one of these languages and the use of this list ensures compatibility across collections and minimises coding costs. This list will be reviewed periodically as different languages assume a greater or lesser significance in the Australian context as a result of changing migration patterns.

43. The 'Other' category is included for those people whose first language spoken is not offered in the list as a response to the question. 'Please specify' is added to the 'Other' category and a space is provided for respondents to write in their language.

44. Each language response to the question will need to be matched to an entry in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

Alternative two

45. If there is a need for more detailed information but space constraints are an over-riding consideration then the tick boxes can be deleted (except the tick box for 'English'), leaving the 'Other - please specify' option for respondents to write in their language. If this is done, however, there will be significant additional coding costs since each response will need to be matched with an entry in the ASCL Coding Index (see Coding Indexes in Classification and Coding).

46. This is only likely to be appropriate in small scale data collection activities and in cases where data entry of verbatim responses is an administrative requirement or where optical

character recognition data capture technologies are used, allowing automatic matching of response data with index entries. The question module would be as follows:

Q1. Which language [did you] [did the person] [did (name)] <u>first</u> speak as a child?

English   q

Other - please specify: .

. . . .

Question module for minimum data

47. The standard question module for minimum data for the variable First Language Spoken follows:

Q1. Which language [did you] [did the person] [did (name)] <u>first</u> speak as a child?

Mark one
box only.

English   q

Other   q

48. This question is suitable for administrative collections or for surveys where there is no requirement for detailed language data or which have space constraints. It is primarily recommended as an identifier of those respondents who may require assistance to access services and information due to inadequate English language skills. Due to the greatly reduced length and detail of this module it is a far less precise measuring device for the identification of language background as it provides no information regarding the range of first languages spoken.

Standard input categories

Input categories for detailed data

49. The standard input categories for First Language Spoken are the base level units of the ASCL and are represented by their four-digit codes. For operational reasons, residual categories and codes and supplementary codes also exist to enable 'not elsewhere classified' and 'inadequately described' responses to be processed within a collection coded at the four-digit level. Full details regarding the standard classification and code structure, residual categories and codes, and supplementary codes can be found in the ASCL.

Input categories for minimum data

50. The standard input categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are:

- English

- Other language.

Output

Contents >> First Language Spoken >> Output

Standard output categories

Output categories for detailed data

51. The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their requirements. Data can be presented at broad group level, narrow group level, or the base (language) level. If necessary, significant languages within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining languages within the narrow group are aggregated. The same principle can be adopted to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

52. Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of statistics, data should be captured, classified and stored at the base-level of the classification wherever possible. Collecting and storing data at the most detailed level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of statistics, enables more detailed and complex analyses, facilitates comparisons with previous data using different classifications, and preserves information that provides maximum flexibility for future use of the data.

53. However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification.

Output categories for minimum data

54. The standard output categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are:

- English
- Other language

Supporting variables

55. The variable First Language Spoken requires no supporting variables.

Measurement issues and related classifications

Contents >> First Language Spoken >> Measurement issues and related classifications

Measurement issues

56. No specific measurement issues apply to the variable First Language Spoken beyond the normal constraints affecting statistical collections, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors which may not permit the collection or output of data for some of the categories at the lower levels of the classification.

Related classifications

57. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), First Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) was used to code language data in both the 1996 and 2001 Censuses. The ASCL, Second Edition, will be used to code language data in the 2006 Census. Correspondence tables have been prepared to compare the two versions of the ASCL, and also the ASCL (First Edition) with the 1991 Census. These correspondence tables can be obtained from the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Correspondence Tables

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

References

Contents >> First Language Spoken >> References

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Main Language Spoken at Home

Contents >> Main Language Spoken at Home

This section contains the following subsection :

Introduction

Contents >> Main Language Spoken at Home >> Introduction

1. The development of Australia as a multicultural society and the subsequent wider interest in constructing statistical profiles of particular ethnic or cultural population groups has, over the years, increased the use of and need for quality language data.

2. To meet these growing needs, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has incorporated language questions in a range of social statistical collections and has developed standards for a number of language variables for use both within and outside the organisation.

3. Information on languages is required for the investigation and development of language services such as interpreter/translation services and for the implementation of national and state policies on language.

4. Data on **Main Language Spoken at Home** are regarded as an indicator of 'active' ethnicity and also as useful for the study of inter-generational language retention. The availability of such data may help providers of language, welfare and community services to effectively target the geographic areas or population groups that need those services.

5. The variable Main Language Spoken at Home has been endorsed by the Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (SCIMA) as one of the standard set of indicators for use in measuring cultural and linguistic diversity. It is to be progressively implemented in administrative and service settings to provide data to determine, measure and monitor service needs (access and equity requirements), and to provide a measure of cultural diversity in its broader sense.

Underlying concepts

Contents >> Main Language Spoken at Home >> Underlying concepts

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

6. Main Language Spoken at Home is defined as the main language spoken by a person in his/her home, on a regular basis, to communicate with other residents of the home and regular visitors to the home.

7. Main Language Spoken at Home is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'. That is, it is an attribute of an individual as opposed to a family or household.

Operational definition

8. Operationally, Main Language Spoken at Home is defined as the main language reported by a person as being spoken in his/her home. If a person reports that he/she speaks more than one language at home, they are asked to report the language spoken most often.

9. The issue of what constitutes a language is addressed in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0). Further references to ASCL in this standard are to the second edition unless otherwise stated.

Discussion of conceptual issues

10. The term 'Language Spoken at Home' has been used previously by the ABS to describe this variable. Other variables such as, First Language Spoken, Preferred Language, Language Usually Spoken, Languages Spoken at Home and Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home have been used in other collections to measure aspects of Australian language usage. However, it is considered that the variable Main Language Spoken at Home and Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home may be used in preference to other language variables when the aim is to measure 'active ethnicity' or the likely disadvantage experienced by persons whose usual language is not English.

11. Main Language Spoken at Home is one of four language variables (the others are Languages Spoken at Home, First Language Spoken and Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home), one of which must be asked before a question on Proficiency in Spoken English. Proficiency in Spoken English identifies people who may potentially suffer a disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English. The purpose of asking a language question before the proficiency question is to filter out those people who mainly speak English, as the purpose of the question is not to attempt to assess the spoken English capacity of the Australian population in general. Respondents are sequenced to the Proficiency in Spoken English question only if a language other than English is selected in the language question.

12. The treatment of sign languages such as Auslan need to be considered when identifying languages spoken in the home. Individuals who use non-verbal forms of communication make up at least one per cent of the Australian population (see the 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers). It should be noted that sign languages fall into two groups, signed English/finger spelling and other sign languages such as Auslan. Signed English/ finger spelling is considered to be another form of English and is treated as such. Auslan is regarded as a distinct language thus, the response 'Auslan' (or another recognised sign language) is not considered to be 'English'.

Classification and coding

Contents >> Main Language Spoken at Home >> Classification and coding

The classification criteria

13. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) is used when collecting, aggregating and disseminating data on language usage in Australia. Two classification criteria are used in the ASCL to form the categories of the classification:

- the relationships between languages owing to their evolution from a common ancestral language (genetic affinity); and

- geographic proximity of languages in terms of the areas in which they originated. (This refers to the area where a language first became, or was first recognised as, a distinct entity.)

14. Further details regarding the classification criteria used in the language classification can be found in the ASCL.

The standard classification

15. When collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the variable Main Language Spoken at Home, the ASCL is used. The term 'language' is used in the ASCL to describe languages, dialects, pidgins, creoles, and invented and sign languages.

16. With the exception of the Yolngu Matha languages (Narrow Group 82) this classification has a three-level hierarchical structure. For the Yolngu Matha languages, an extra level has been added between the narrow group and the language level of the classification in the second edition. These extra level categories are meaningful and useful groups of base level units which taken together form the narrow group. Nine 'extra level' categories have been included for the narrow group. The extra level is identified by a three-digit code, the first two digits of which identify the narrow group. The most detailed level of the classification consists of 364 (170 Australian Indigenous and 194 non-Australian Indigenous) base or third level units which are languages (as defined above). Included in the 364 base level units are 41 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) and three 'other' categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

17. The second level of the classification comprises 51 narrow groups of languages which are similar in terms of the classification criteria (genetic affinity and geographic proximity in terms of the areas in which they originated). Included in the 51 narrow groups are seven 'other' categories which consist of languages which do not fit into a particular narrow group.

18. The first and most general level of the classification comprises nine broad groups of languages including one 'other' category. Broad groups are formed by aggregating geographically proximate narrow groups.

19. Further details regarding the standard classification and code structure can be found in the ASCL.

The code structure

20. One, two and four-digit codes are assigned to the first, second and base level units of the classification respectively. The first digit identifies the broad group in which each language or narrow group is contained. The first two digits taken together identify the narrow group in which each language is contained. The four-digit codes represent each of the 364 Languages or base level units.In the exceptional Narrow Group 82 of the ASCL, Second Edition the first three digits identify the third level classification groupings of languages while the four digit code identifies each specific language (see 21 b).

21. The following examples illustrate the coding scheme:

a. Broad Group   5   Southern Asian Languages
    Narrow Group   52   Indo-Aryan
    Language   5206   Nepali

b. Broad Group   8   Australian Indigenous
                             Languages
    Narrow Group   82   Yolngu Matha
    Extra Level   824   Dhuwala
    Language   8245   Madarrpa

22. Further details regarding the code structure can be found in the ASCL.

Residual categories and codes

23. In narrow groups, a four-digit code, consisting of the two digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits '99', is reserved as a residual 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. Additionally, in the third level classification groups of Narrow Group 82, the three-digit group code is followed by '9' to denote a 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. All languages which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the residual 'n.e.c.' or 'other' category of the narrow group to which they relate.

24. In each broad group, two-digit codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by '9'. These categories are termed 'other' and consist of separately identified languages which do not fit into any of the narrow groups contained within the broad group, on the basis of the classification criteria.

25. Further details regarding the residual categories 'n.e.c.' and codes used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Supplementary codes

26. The supplementary codes are of two types:

- four-digit codes ending with one, two or three zeros; and
- four-digit codes commencing with three zeros.

27. Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (n.f.d.) codes and are used to code responses to a question about language which cannot be coded to the detailed (language) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

28. Four-digit codes commencing with '000' are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described languages, etc., which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated a language, narrow group or broad group code.

29. Further details regarding the supplementary codes (eg. 'not further defined' (n.f.d.), 'inadequately described' and 'not stated') used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Scope of the variable

30. The variable Languages Spoken at Home applies to all persons.

Application of the classification to other variables

31. The ASCL can be used for a variety of variables, in particular First Language Spoken, Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home, Language of Greatest Competency, Languages Spoken at Home and Preferred Language.

Coding procedures

32. Language responses to the Main Language Spoken at Home question are coded to the ASCL using the guidelines detailed in that classification. Each language response is matched with an entry in the ASCL Coding Index to determine the correct code.

Coding indexes

33. A coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the ASCL and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to Main Language Spoken at Home. It contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to language and their correct classification codes. Use of the coding index enables responses to be coded accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

34. Copies of the coding index sorted in alphabetical and numerical (code) order can be found in the ASCL, Second Edition publication. They can also be found separately in electronic form (.csv and .xls) on the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Coding Indexes

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

Collection methods

Standard question module

35. There are two standard question modules for Main Language Spoken at Home:

- The Question Module for Detailed Data elicits the most detailed responses and data on Main Language Spoken at Home.

  There are two alternatives for the Question Module for Detailed Data which may be used, depending on space and cost considerations:

  - Alternative one: a set of 'most likely' languages with tick boxes and an 'Other -please specify' response category for writing a language not specified in the tick box list;

  - Alternative two: a tick box for 'English' and an 'Other - please specify' write-in category.

  Alternative two is more compact but will incur additional coding costs.

- The Question Module for Minimum Data contains only the tick box options 'English' and 'Other' and therefore does not collect details as to which language other than English is spoken.

Question module for detailed data

Alternative one

36. The standard question for Main Language Spoken at Home was designed for self-enumerated and interview-based surveys. However, it could also be used in administrative collections if clear instructions were included regarding the choice of only one language (the language spoken most often) when respondents speak multiple languages at home.

37. The standard question module for obtaining detailed data for Main Language Spoken at Home follows:

Q1.　　　　　　**Which language [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] mainly speak at home?**

(If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often.)
.

English	❑
Italian	❑
Greek	❑
Cantonese	❑
Arabic	❑
Mandarin	❑

Vietnamese	❑
Spanish	❑
German	❑
Hindi	❑

Other - please specify: . . . .

37a. A computer assisted interviewing (CAI) module for standard language variables has been developed. This module includes four standard language questions including the standard question module for Main Languages Spoken at Home and can be found in the Blaise instrument - see **Appendix A** for information on how to install and run this module. If you require assistance please contact the Assistant Director of Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support on extension 6680.

37b. To use the standard question module for Main Languages Spoken at Home please inform Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support at the question specification stage of survey development by including a statement to that effect in your question specifications.

38. Instructions are included for those respondents who speak more than one language in the home. For self-enumerated surveys, respondents are instructed to indicate the language spoken most often and to mark one box in the checklist or to write in one response where tick boxes don't apply. For interview-based collections, an interviewer could use a prompt like "Which of those languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] use most often?" if a multiple response is given after asking the question.

39. The list of languages provided with this module has been included primarily on the basis of the statistical significance of these languages in the Australian context. Cantonese and Mandarin are both included to ensure that the response 'Chinese' is not erroneously coded to one or the other. Approximately 90% of Australians speak at least one of these languages and the use of this list ensures compatibility across collections and minimises coding costs. This list will be reviewed periodically as different languages assume a greater or lesser significance in the Australian context as a result of changing migration patterns.

40. The 'Other' category is included for those people who speak a language in the home that is not offered in the list as a response to the question. 'Please specify' is added to the 'Other' category and a space is provided for respondents to write in their language.

41. Each language response to the question will need to be matched to an entry in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

Alternative two

42. If there is a need for detailed information but space constraints are an over-riding consideration then the tick boxes can be deleted (except the tick box for 'English'), leaving the 'Other - please specify' option for respondents to write in their language. If this is done, however, there will be significant additional coding costs since each response will need to be matched to an entry in the ASCL Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

43. This is only likely to be appropriate in small scale data collection activities and in cases where data entry of verbatim responses is an administrative requirement or where optical character recognition data capture technologies are used, allowing automatic matching of response data with index entries. The question module would be as follows:

Q1. Which language [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] mainly speak at home?

English   q

Other - please specify: . . . . .
. . . .

Question module for minimum data

44. The standard question module for minimum data for the variable Main Language Spoken at Home follows:

Q1. Which language [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] mainly speak at home?

Mark one box
only.

English   q

Other   q

45. This question is suitable for administrative collections or for surveys where there is no requirement for detailed language data or which have space constraints. It is primarily recommended as an identifier of those respondents who may require assistance to access services and information because they possess inadequate English language skills. Owing to its lack of detail, this module it is far less precise in the identification of a person's language usage.

Standard input categories

Input categories for detailed data

46. The standard input categories for the Question Module for Detailed Data for Main Language Spoken at Home are the base level units of the ASCL and are represented by their four-digit codes. For operational reasons, residual categories and codes and supplementary codes also exist to enable 'not elsewhere classified' and 'inadequately described' responses to be processed within a collection coded at the four-digit level. Full details regarding the standard classification and code structure, residual categories and codes, and supplementary codes can be found in the ASCL.

Input categories for minimum data

47. The standard input categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are:

- English

- Other language.

Output

Contents >> Main Language Spoken at Home >> Output

Standard output categories

Output categories for detailed data

48. The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. No. 1267.0) allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their requirements. Data can be presented at broad group level, narrow group level, or the base (language) level. If necessary, significant languages within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining languages within the narrow group are aggregated. For example, the base level category 'Tiwi' can be separately identified as an output category within the 'Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' Narrow Group, with the remaining base-level categories in this narrow group aggregated in an 'Other Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' category. The same principle can be adopted to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

49. Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of statistics, data should be captured, classified and stored at the base-level of the classification wherever possible. Collecting and storing data at the most detailed level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of statistics, enables more detailed and complex analyses, facilitates comparisons with previous data using different classifications, and preserves information that provides maximum flexibility for future use of the data.

50. However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification.

Output categories for minimum data

51. The standard output categories for the Question Module for Minimum Data are :

- English
- Other language

Supporting variables

52. Main Language Spoken at Home does not require any supporting variables.

Measurement issues and related classifications

Measurement issues

53. No specific measurement issues apply to the variable Main Language Spoken at Home beyond the normal constraints affecting statistical collections, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors which may not permit the collection or output of data for some of the categories at the lower levels of the classification.

Related classifications

54. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) was used to code language data in the 1996 and 2001 Censuses. Correspondence tables have been prepared to compare the two versions of the ASCL and also the ASCL (First Edition) with the 1991 Census. These correspondence tables can be obtained from the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Correspondence Tables

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

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Languages Spoken at Home

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home

This section contains the following subsection :

Introduction

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> Introduction

1. The development of Australia as a multicultural society and the subsequent wider interest in constructing statistical profiles of particular ethnic or cultural population groups has, over the years, increased the need for quality language data.

2. To meet this growing need, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has incorporated language questions in a range of social statistical collections and has developed standards for a number of language variables for use both within and outside the organisation.

3. **Languages Spoken at Home** identifies all languages spoken within the home. This variable provides data on the stock of languages spoken in Australian homes. Data on languages spoken in the home are regarded as an indicator of active ethnicity and are useful for the study of inter-generational language retention. The availability of such data may also help providers of language, welfare and community services to effectively target the population groups that need those services.

4. The variable Languages Spoken at Home has been endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as one of the standard set of indicators for use in measuring cultural and linguistic diversity. It is to be progressively implemented in administrative and service settings to provide data to determine, measure and monitor service needs (in terms of access and equity requirements), and to provide a measure of cultural diversity in its broader sense.

Underlying concepts

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> Underlying concepts

Name of variable

5. The standard name of the variable is Languages Spoken at Home.

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

6. Languages Spoken at Home is defined as the language or languages spoken by a person in his/her home, on a regular basis, to communicate with other residents of the home and regular visitors to the home.

7. Languages Spoken at Home is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'. That is, it is an attribute of an individual as opposed to a family or household.

Operational definition

8. Operationally, Languages Spoken at Home is defined as the language or languages reported by a person as being spoken in his/her home. There is no restriction on the number of languages reported by the respondent as being spoken in the home.

9. The issue of what constitutes a language is addressed in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0). Further references to ASCL in this standard are to the Second Edition unless otherwise stated.

Discussion of conceptual issues

10. Languages Spoken at Home identifies all languages spoken within the home. This variable provides data on the stock of languages spoken in Australian homes.

11. Related language variables such as First Language Spoken, Main Language Spoken at Home and Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home are most commonly used in collections to measure aspects of Australian language usage. However, these variables only collect one language response which may not reflect complete language use. It is considered that Languages Spoken at Home should be used in preference to other language variables when the aim is to collect data on the stock of languages used in the home. In some cases, however, this measure may not reflect complete language use when, for example, only one language is spoken in the home but other languages are spoken outside the home, within a person's ethnic community group. It also does not tell you how often languages are used in a particular home and therefore may capture languages that are used infrequently.

12. The treatment of sign languages such as Auslan need to be considered when identifying languages spoken in the home. Individuals who use non-verbal forms of communication make up at least one per cent of the Australian population (see the 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers). It should be noted that sign languages fall into two groups, signed English/finger spelling and other sign languages such as Auslan. Signed English/ finger spelling is considered to be another form of English and is treated as such. Auslan is regarded as a distinct language and is treated as a language other than English.

Classification and coding

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> Classification and coding

The classification criteria

13. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) is used when collecting, aggregating and disseminating data on language usage in Australia. Two classification criteria are used in the ASCL to form the categories of the classification:

- the relationships between languages owing to their evolution from a common ancestral language (genetic affinity); and
- geographic proximity of languages in terms of the areas in which they originated. (This refers to the area where a language first became, or was first recognised as, a distinct entity.)

14. Further details regarding the classification criteria used in the language classification can be found in the ASCL.

The standard classification

15. The ASCL is used when collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the variable Languages Spoken at Home. The term 'language' is used in the ASCL to describe languages, dialects, pidgins, creoles and invented and sign languages.

16. With the exception of the Yolngu Matha languages (Narrow Group 82) this classification has a three-level hierarchical structure. For the Yolngu Matha languages, an extra level has been added between the narrow group and the language level of the classification in the second edition. These extra level categories are meaningful and useful groups of base level units which taken together form the narrow group. Nine 'extra level' categories have been included for the narrow group. The extra level is identified by a three-digit code, the first two digits of which identify the narrow group.

17. The most detailed level of the classification consists of 364 (170 Australian Indigenous and 194 non-Australian Indigenous) base level units which are languages (as defined above). Included in the 364 base level units are 41 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) and three 'other' categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

18. The second level of the classification comprises 51 narrow groups of languages which are similar in terms of the classification criteria (genetic affinity and geographic proximity in terms of the areas in which they originated). Included in the 51 narrow groups are seven 'other' categories which consist of languages which do not fit into a particular narrow group.

19. The first and most general level of the classification comprises nine broad groups of languages including one 'other' category. Broad groups are formed by aggregating geographically proximate narrow groups.

20. Further details regarding the standard classification and code structure can be found in the ASCL.

The code structure

21. One, two and four-digit codes are assigned to the first, second and base level units of the classification respectively. The first digit identifies the broad group in which each language or narrow group is contained. The first two digits taken together identify the narrow group in which each language is contained. The four-digit codes represent each of the 364 Languages or base level units. In the exceptional Narrow Group 82 of the ASCL, Second

Edition the first three digits identify the third level classification groupings of languages while the four digit code identifies each specific language (see 22 b).

22. The following examples illustrate the coding scheme:

a. Broad Group   5   Southern Asian Languages
    Narrow Group   52   Indo-Aryan
    Language   5206   Nepali

b. Broad Group   8   Australian Indigenous
                             Languages
    Narrow Group   82   Yolngu Matha
    Extra Level   824   Dhuwala
    Language   8245   Madarrpa

23. Further details regarding the code structure can be found in the ASCL.

Residual categories and codes

24. In narrow groups, a four-digit code, consisting of the two digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits '99', is reserved as a residual 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. Additionally, in the third level classification groups of Narrow Group 82, the three-digit group code is followed by '9' to denote a 'not elsewhere classified' (n.e.c.) or 'other' category. All languages which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the residual 'n.e.c.' or 'other' category of the narrow group to which they relate.

25. In each broad group, two-digit codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by '9'. These categories are termed 'Other' and consist of separately identified languages which do not fit into any of the narrow groups contained within the broad group, on the basis of the classification criteria.

26. Further details regarding the residual categories 'n.e.c.' and codes used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Supplementary codes

27. The supplementary codes are of two types:

  - four-digit codes ending with one, two or three zeros; and
  - four-digit codes commencing with three zeros.

28. Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (n.f.d.) codes and are used to code responses to a question about language which cannot be coded to the detailed (language) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

29. Four-digit codes commencing with '000' are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described languages, etc., which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated a language, narrow group or broad group code.

30. Further details regarding the supplementary codes (eg. 'not further defined' (n.f.d.), 'inadequately described' and 'not stated') used when coding language data can be found in the ASCL.

Scope of the variable

31. The variable Languages Spoken at Home applies to all persons.

Application of the classification to other variables

32. The ASCL can be used for a variety of variables. These include: First Language Spoken, Main Language Spoken at Home, and Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home, Language of Greatest Competency and Preferred Language.

Coding procedures

33. Language responses to the Languages Spoken at Home question are coded to the ASCL using the guidelines detailed in that classification. Each language response is matched with an entry in the ASCL Coding Index to determine the correct code.

Coding indexes

34. A coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the ASCL and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to Languages Spoken at Home. It contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to language and their correct classification codes. Use of the coding index enables responses to be coded accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

35. Copies of the coding index sorted in alphabetical and numerical (code) order can be found in the ASCL, Second Edition publication. They can also be found separately in electronic form (.csv and .xls) on the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Coding Indexes

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736, or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

Collection methods

Standard question module

35. The standard question module for Languages Spoken at Home elicits the most detailed responses and data. There are two alternatives which may be used, depending on space and cost considerations:

- Alternative one: a set of 'most likely' languages with tick boxes and an 'Other -please specify' response category for writing languages not specified in the tick box list;

- Alternative two: response category only for writing languages (ie. tick boxes removed).

36. Alternative two is more compact but will incur additional coding costs.

Alternative one

37. The standard question module for Languages Spoken at Home follows:

Q1. **Which language or languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] speak at home?**
(Please indicate all languages spoken)

English	q
Italian	q
Greek	q
Cantonese	q
Arabic	q
Mandarin	q
Vietnamese	q
Spanish	q
German	q
Hindi	q
Other - please specify:	. . . .
	. . . .
	. . . .
	. . . .
	.
	. . . .
	. . . .
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37a. A computer assisted interviewing (CAI) module for standard language variables has been developed. This module includes four standard language questions including the standard question module for Languages Spoken at Home and can be found in the Blaise instrument - see **Appendix A** for information on how to install and run this module. If you require assistance please contact the Assistant Director of Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support on extension 6680.

37b. To use the standard question module for Languages Spoken at Home in a CAI survey please inform Data Management, Dissemination and Survey Support at the question specification stage of survey development by including a statement to that effect in your question specifications.

38. The list of languages provided with this question module has been included primarily on the basis of the statistical significance of these languages in the Australian context. Approximately 90% of Australians speak at least one of these languages and the use of this list ensures compatibility across collections and minimises coding costs. Cantonese and Mandarin are both included to ensure that the response 'Chinese', for example, is not erroneously coded to one or the other. It will be reviewed periodically as different languages assume a greater or lesser significance in the Australian context as a result of changing migration patterns.

39. The 'Other' category is included for those people who speak a language in the home that is not offered in the list as a response to the question. 'Please specify' is added to the 'Other' category with space provided for respondents to write in their language(s).

40. Each language response to the question will need to be matched to an entry in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

Alternative two

41. If there is a need for detailed information but space constraints are an over-riding consideration, space can be provided for respondents to write in their language(s). If this is done, however, there will be significant additional coding costs since each response will need to be matched to an entry in the ASCL Coding Index (see Coding Procedures in Classification and Coding).

42. This is only likely to be appropriate in small scale data collection activities and in cases where data entry of verbatim responses is an administrative requirement or where optical character recognition data capture technologies are used, allowing automatic matching of response data with index entries. The question module would be as follows:

Q1.   **Which language or languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] speak at home?**

Please specify
all languages

spoken:

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Standard input categories

43. The standard input categories for Languages Spoken at Home are the base level units of the ASCL and are represented by their four-digit codes. For operational reasons, residual categories and codes and supplementary codes also exist to enable 'not elsewhere classified' and 'inadequately described' responses to be processed within a collection coded at the four-digit level. Full details regarding the standard classification and code structure, residual categories and codes, and supplementary codes can be found in the ASCL.

Output

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> Output

Standard output categories

44. The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their requirements. Data can be presented at the broad group level, narrow group level, or base (language) level. If necessary, significant languages within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining languages within the narrow group are aggregated. For example, the base level

category 'Tiwi' can be separately identified as an output category within the 'Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' Narrow Group, with the remaining base-level categories in this narrow group aggregated in an 'Other Arnhem Land and Daly River Region Languages' category. The same principle can be adopted to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

45. Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of statistics, data should be captured, classified and stored at the base-level of the ASCL wherever possible. Collecting and storing data at the most detailed level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of statistics, enables more detailed and complex analysis, facilitates comparisons with previous data using different classifications, and preserves information that provides maximum flexibility for future use of the data.

46. However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification.

Supporting variables

47. Languages Spoken at Home does not require any supporting variables.

Measurement issues and related classifications

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> Measurement issues and related classifications

Measurement issues

48. No specific measurement issues apply to the variable Languages Spoken at Home beyond the normal constraints affecting statistical collections, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors which may not permit the collection or output of data for some of the categories at the lower levels of the classification.

Related classifications

49. The Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), First Edition (ABS cat. no. 1267.0) was used to code language data in the 1996 and 2001 Censuses. The ASCL, Second Edition, will be used to code language data in the 2006 Census. Correspondence tables have been prepared to compare the two versions of the ASCL and also the ASCL, First Edition, with the 1991 Census. These correspondence tables can be obtained from the ABS web site (www.abs.gov.au) via this link:

Correspondence Tables

or by contacting the Assistant Director, Social Classifications and Standards, Classifications and Data Standards Section, Australian Bureau of Statistics on phone (02) 6252 5736 or e-mail social.classifications@abs.gov.au.

References

Contents >> Languages Spoken at Home >> References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), 1986. The Measurement of Ethnicity in the Australian Census of Population and Housing: Report to the Australian Statistician by the 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee, cat. no. 2172.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 1997. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), cat. no. 1267.0, ABS, Canberra
- ABS, 1999. Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, cat. no. 1289.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS, 2005. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition, cat. no. 1267.0, ABS, Canberra.

Proficiency in Spoken English

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English

This section contains the following subsection :
Introduction
Underlying concepts
Classification and coding
Collection methods
Output
Measurement issues and related classifications
References

Introduction

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Introduction

1. The development of Australia as a multicultural society and the subsequent wider interest in constructing statistical profiles of particular ethnic or cultural population groups has, over the years, increased the need for quality language data.

2. To meet this growing need, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has incorporated language questions in a range of social statistical collections and has developed standards for a number of language variables for use both within and outside the organisation.

3. **Proficiency in Spoken English** is a variable used to assess the ability in spoken English

of people whose first language spoken was a language other than English, or who speak a language other than English at home.

4. Data relating to this variable is used primarily to identify people who may suffer disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English. This information can be used to target the provision of services to people whose lack of ability in spoken English is potentially a barrier to gaining access to government programs and services, and participating equitably in Australian society.

5. The variable Proficiency in Spoken English has been endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as one of the four Minimum Core Indicators of the standard set of indicators for use in measuring cultural and linguistic diversity. The set is to be progressively implemented in administrative and service settings to provide data to determine, measure and monitor service needs (access and equity requirements), and to provide a measure of cultural diversity in its broader sense.

Underlying concepts

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Underlying concepts

Name of variable

6. The name of the variable is Proficiency in Spoken English.

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

7. The variable Proficiency in Spoken English is defined as the ability to speak English in every day situations.

8. Proficiency in Spoken English is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'. That is, it is an attribute of an individual as opposed to a family or household.

Operational definition

9. Operationally, the variable is defined as the self-assessed level of ability to speak English, asked of people whose first language spoken was a language other than English or who speak a language other than English at home.

Discussion of conceptual issues

10. This variable was formerly called 'Proficiency in English', a name which implied a measurement of all aspects of proficiency: speaking, listening, writing and reading. However, in ABS collections this variable has only ever been a measurement of spoken English proficiency and therefore 'Proficiency in Spoken English' is a more accurate label.

11. A purpose built instrument such as the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) can be used to directly measure a subject's proficiency in English. The ASLPR

now renamed to International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR) examines proficiency in four aspects of communication: speaking, listening, writing and reading. There are 12 levels of rating from 0 to 5 including intermediate 'plus' or 'minus' levels. A zero proficiency rating is given to those unable to function in the spoken language and a five is given to speakers with native-like proficiency whereby a person's proficiency is judged to be equivalent to that of a 'native speaker of the same socio-cultural variety'. Obviously, social surveys cannot measure proficiency in spoken English with the same degree of precision as a formal test. An answer to the question 'How well do you speak English?' will depend on how the respondent interprets the question. Respondents whose spoken English ability enables them to do the shopping and manage many everyday transactions may consider that they speak English very well even though they may not be able to hold a social conversation in English. Conversely, more exacting or self-critical respondents may consider that they do not speak English well in spite of the fact that they can communicate with near native proficiency.

12. ABS pilot testing of this question prior to the 1981 Census examined the issue of the degree of correspondence between self-assessed proficiency and a formal test using an abbreviated version of the ASLPR. Although there was a discernible trend for respondents with higher ratings to understate their ability, there was an overall correspondence between the numbers with low ratings and those reporting their ability as Not Well or Not at All. This indicates that the variable provides a reasonably reliable measure of the number of people who may be in need of targeted services.

13. In most ABS surveys, a question on Proficiency in Spoken English is asked only of respondents whose first language spoken was a language other than English, or those who speak a language other than English at home. This is because the variable is used primarily to identify people who may suffer a disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English. However, in the 1996 Aspects of Literacy Survey, a question on Proficiency in Spoken English was asked of the whole population. As the Aspects of Literacy Survey did not filter out native English speakers and had a different set of response categories, the output is not comparable with other surveys.

14. A related data item 'English Language Capacity' has been collected in ABS Special Supplementary Surveys and Monthly Population Surveys to help resolve data quality issues or assess the need for an interpreter to assist with the interview. In these surveys the interviewer is asked to state whether the interview was conducted: fully in English, easily or with difficulty; partly in languages other than English; or fully in a language other than English. As is the case for Proficiency in Spoken English, there are problems associated with this approach because it relies on a subjective (in this case the interviewer's) assessment of how well the respondent speaks English. Although normally only an input data item, 'English Language Capacity' was available on request as an output variable from the 1992 Survey of Families in Australia.

Classification and coding

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Classification and coding

The classification criteria

15. Not applicable.

The standard classification

16. The standard classification is a flat or single-level classification consisting of four categories:

- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- Not at all

The code structure

17. The code structure is simply:

1 Very well
2 Well
3 Not well
4 Not at all

Residual categories and codes

18. Not applicable.

Supplementary codes

19. Two supplementary codes are reserved for the following conditions:

0 Not stated/Inadequately described

9 Not applicable - (where respondents did not speak a language other than English for their first language spoken and do not speak a language other then English at home.)

Scope of the variable

20. The variable Proficiency in Spoken English applies to all persons who did not speak English as their first language or who speak another language at home.

Application of the classification to other variables

21. The Proficiency in Spoken English classification is not applicable to any other variable.

Coding procedures

22. Proficiency in Spoken English is self-coded to the classification.

Collection methods

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Collection methods

Standard question module

Filter questions

23. The question on Proficiency in Spoken English is asked after a question which identifies people whose first language spoken was a language other than English, or people who speak a language other than English at home. This sequencing is necessary because the Proficiency in Spoken English variable is used to measure the number of people who may potentially suffer a disadvantage as a result of a lack of competence in spoken English, rather than assess the spoken English capacity of the Australian population in general. It is considered inappropriate to ask people whose only language is English, how well they speak it, as this may imply that they do not speak English well, even though they may have been speaking it all their lives.

24. The Proficiency in Spoken English question should be asked after a language question which filters out people who only speak English. There are three filter questions to choose from:

- Filter 1 - First Language Spoken;

- Filter 2 - Main Language Spoken at Home;

- Filter 3 - Main Language Other than English Spoken at Home.

25. Only ONE filter question is required. The preferred filter question for this variable is First Language Spoken. The question module for minimum data for the First Language Spoken variable is also a suitable filter question.

FILTER 1 - First Language Spoken

Q1.   **Which language [did you] [did the person] [did (name)] <u>first</u> speak as a child?**

<div align="center">Mark one box only.</div>

English	❑
Italian	❑
Greek	❑
Cantonese	❑
Mandarin	❑

Arabic	❑
Vietnamese	❑
German	❑
Spanish	❑
Tagalog (Filipino)	❑

Other - please specify: . . . .

Sequence guide:
- If response is 'English', then No More Questions.

- If response is any language other than English, then go to (Q2) - Proficiency in Spoken English question.

OR

FILTER 2 - Main Language Spoken at Home

Q1. **Which language [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] mainly speak at home?**

(If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often.)
.

English	❑
Italian	❑
Greek	❑
Cantonese	❑
Mandarin	❑
Arabic	❑
Vietnamese	❑
German	❑
Spanish	❑
Tagalog (Filipino)	❑

Other - please specify: . . . .

Sequence guide:
- If response is 'English', then No More Questions.

- If response is any language other than English, then go to (Q2) - Proficiency in Spoken English question.

OR

FILTER 3 - Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home

Q1. **[Do you] [Does the person] [Does (name)] speak a language other than English at home?**
(If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often.)

No,	English only	❑
Yes,	Italian	❑
Yes,	Greek	❑
Yes,	Cantonese	❑
Yes,	Mandarin	❑
Yes,	Arabic	❑
Yes,	Vietnamese	❑
Yes,	German	❑
Yes,	Spanish	❑
Yes,	Tagalog (Filipino)	❑
Yes,	Other - please specify:	

Sequence guide:
- If response is 'No, English only', then No More Questions.

- If response is any language other than English, then go to (Q2) - Proficiency in Spoken English question.

Standard questions

26. There are two standard questions for Proficiency in Spoken English:

- self-enumerated surveys

- surveys conducted by interview.

Self-enumerated surveys

Q2.	How well [do you] [does the person] speak English?
Very well	❑
Well	❑
Not well	❑
Not at all	❑

Interview-based surveys

Q2.	Do you consider [you speak] [(name) speaks] English very well, well, or not well?
Very well	❑
Well	❑
Not well	❑
Not at all	❑

27. A separate question is required for interview-based surveys as, unlike a self-enumerated question where respondents can see the response choices and use them to interpret the question, respondents may be unaware of how to rate their proficiency when the interviewer asks the question "How well do you speak English?". Including the options 'very well', 'well' and 'not well' when asking the question gives the respondents some idea of how to rate their proficiency. It is important that this question records the respondent's own perception of how well they rate their English speaking skills.

Standard input categories

28. The standard input categories for Proficiency in Spoken English are the same as the categories of the classification and also includes the two supplementary categories, 'Not stated/Inadequately described' and 'Not applicable':

- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- Not at all
- Not stated/Inadequately described

- Not applicable

Output

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Output

Standard output categories

29. The standard output categories are the same as the categories of the classification and includes the supplementary categories if applicable:

  - Very well
  - Well
  - Not well
  - Not at all
  - Not stated/Inadequately described
  - Not applicable

30. As the distinction between the categories 'Very well' and 'Well' is somewhat subjective, they can be amalgamated into the output category 'Well or Very well'. Similarly, 'Not well' and 'Not at all' can be amalgamated into the output category 'Not well or Not at all'. In this case, the output categories would be as follows:

  - Well or Very well
  - Not well or Not at all
  - Not stated/Inadequately described
  - Not applicable

Measurement issues and related classifications

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> Measurement issues and related classifications

Measurement issues

31. The ABS considers it is inappropriate to ask people who use sign languages how well they speak English. This should be avoided wherever possible if these people are filtered to the Proficiency in Spoken English question.

Related classifications

32. There are no related classifications.

References

Contents >> Proficiency in Spoken English >> References

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History of Changes

This document was added or updated on 18/04/2017.

19/04/2017
Links on the Contents page to the updated standards were amended to connect to the most recent standards.